R E P O R T R E S U M E S

ED 010 973 RC 000 938

LOUISIANA STORY, 1964, THE SUGAR SYSTEM AND THE PLANTATION WORKERS.

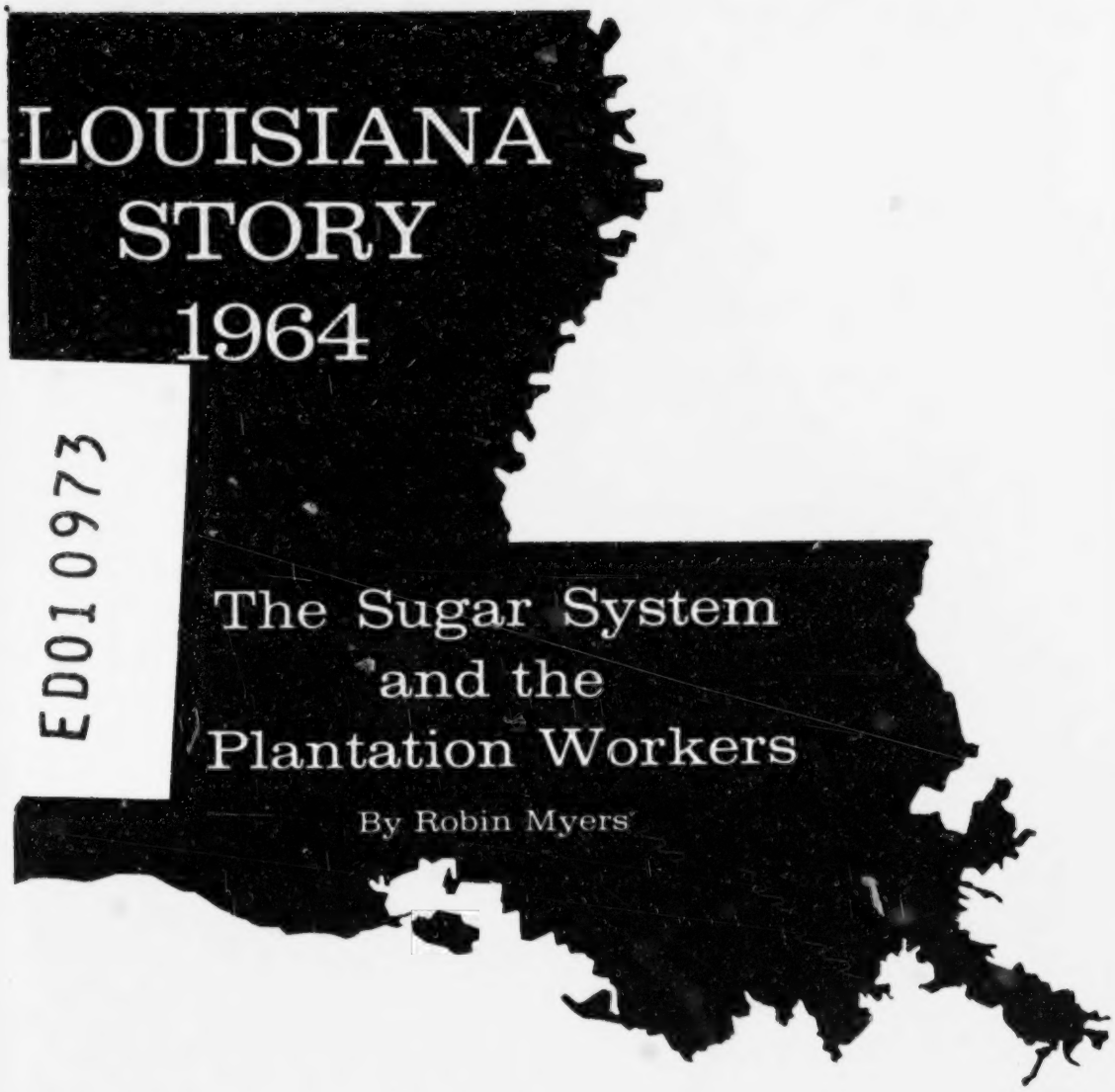
BY- MYERS, ROBIN
NATIONAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON FARM LABOR,NEW YORK

PUB DATE 64

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.09 HC-$1.72 43P.

DESCRIPTORS- *AGRICULTURAL LABORERS, *WAGES, *LIVING STANDARDS, *EMPLOYMENT, RURAL EDUCATION, UNIONS, STATISTICAL DATA, HOUSING, NEGROES, MINIMUM WAGE LEGISLATION, LEGISLATION, AUTOMATION, LABOR UNIONS, EDUCATION, NEW YORK CITY, LOUISIANA

BASED UPON THE FINDINGS OF A RURAL EDUCATION AND WELFARE SURVEY OF MORE THAN 900 SUGARCANE WORKERS IN THE NINE LOUISIANA COUNTIES WHERE SUGARCANE CULTIVATION IS CONCENTRATED, THIS DOCUMENT TELLS OF THE LIVES OF THE WORKERS AND EXPLAINS THE NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL "SUGAR SYSTEM" UNDER WHICH THEY LIVE. DISCUSSED ARE THE EFFECTS OF MECHANIZATION ON THE SUGAR INDUSTRY, WORKERS' WAGES, THE WORKERS' HOUSING, LIVING, AND WORKING CONDITIONS, THE HISTORY OF THE SUGAR INDUSTRY IN LOUISIANA, LEGISLATION PERTAINING TO THE LOUISIANA NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL SUGAR INDUSTRIES, UNIONIZATION FOR SUGAR WORKERS, A MANPOWER DEVELOPMENT AND TRAINING ACT PROGRAM, AND THE FUTURE OF SUGARCANE WORKERS. THE DOCUMENT INCLUDES THE SURVEY FORM WITH A QUESTION-BY-QUESTION SUMMARY OF THE RESULTS. (RB)



ED010973

published by
NATIONAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON FARM LABOR
112 East 19th Street
New York, New York, 10003

000 938
01006

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL OFFICE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY.

Louisiana Story, 1964

The Sugar System and the Plantation Workers

by

ROBIN MYERS
Research Consultant
National Advisory Committee on Farm Labor

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This pamphlet could not have been written without help from three important sources. The first is the study of the life of Louisiana sugar cane workers and their attempt to organize in 1953, prepared by Ernesto Galarza for the Inter-American Educational Association. The second is the 1961-62 survey of the living and working conditions of these workers made under a grant by the National Sharecroppers Fund to the Rural Education and Welfare Fund. The third is the study, *Workers in the Sugar Cane,* prepared on the basis of the survey by the Rev. Joseph H. Fichter, S.J., head of the Department of Sociology of Loyola University of the South. To all of these the pamphlet is more indebted than its footnotes can well express.

INTRODUCTION

Louisiana Story, 1964, tells of the lives of the sugar cane workers, and explains the national and international "sugar system" under which they live. It is based upon a survey of more than 900 of these workers who were interviewed at home and at work in the nine Louisiana parishes (counties) where sugar cane cultivation is concentrated.

The Sugar Act both controls the amount of domestic sugar production through subsidies to the growers who abide by acreage allotments, and provides that "fair and reasonable" wages be paid the workers. For the growers this works out well. Since the Castro revolution and the American embargo on Cuban sugar, the acreage allotments have been suspended or expanded each year. At the same time, a world system of import allotments insures that the United States supply of sugar will be adequate, without creating a surplus to jeopardize the American growers' return on their crop. In 1960, the return on capital investment was 8.3 per cent, and it has been rising ever since. Subsidy payments to Louisiana producers in 1963 amounted to more than eleven million dollars.

With risks controlled and profits guaranteed to growers, one might reasonably expect that the workers would be in a similarly protected position. The Sugar Act does, in fact, make sugar cane workers slightly better off than other agricultural workers in the United States. Wages have been rising steadily in recent years under annual wage determinations made, after public hearings, by the Department of Agriculture. But even after a considerable advance in 1964, these wages are still below the national minimum wage that applies to non-agricultural workers.

Meanwhile, like other farm laborers, the sugar cane workers are excluded from the labor legislation that protects the right to organize and bargain collectively. In the past, their

organizing efforts have been broken by injunctions and violence. They live in miserable housing in wretched communities that are virtually company towns.

This pamphlet tells the story. American consumers subsidize the sugar industry not only with tax dollars but with continued toleration of the conditions under which the sugar cane workers live and work.

Louisiana Story, 1964, is another in a series of factual pamphlets published by the National Advisory Committee on Farm Labor to inform the American people about the conditions of the nation's farm workers. We hope you will read it and that it will stir you to take action on behalf of our still voiceless and almost "forgotten people."

FAY BENNETT
Executive Secretary
National Advisory Committee
on Farm Labor

September, 1964

Louisiana Story, 1964

> . . . About the only thing that remains the same as we found it in 1953 is housing, living and working conditions. . . . There were about 2,000 of them [sugar cane workers] then and there seems to be about the same number now, just a little bit older, and still in debt, and—I might add—waiting for the Union to come back. . . .[1]

So wrote a man who had been closely identified with the last attempt of the sugar cane workers of Louisiana to break out of the cycle of poverty and debt, ignorance and misery, that had been their lot for two centuries, by organizing a union of their own. It was his reaction to the first returns from a survey of the wages and working conditions of a thousand sugar cane workers on plantations scattered on both banks of the winding Mississippi from near Baton Rouge south to near New Orleans.[2]

It is hard to translate human experiences into statistics, and harder still to clothe statistics with flesh and blood so that they come alive for those who have never sweated in the canebrake under a 90° summer sun and waded home through a swamp; have never seen the debt rise at the company store as the number of children grew in the cabin; and have not taken the eldest son out to the fields on his first job with mingled relief that a few more dollars were coming in, and bitterness that the life of father, grandfather, great-grandfather was being repeated in a fourth generation. The attempt will be made here to summarize the survey and to humanize the figures in the life of a sugar cane family.

Frankie Brown is a real person. And so is Frankie Brown, Junior. The facts and figures cited here are taken from survey forms 0767 and 0769. The history and background, the life and death of the union, the hypothetical South Delta sugar plantation, and the story of sugar are drawn from varied sources and from the survey as a whole. The training program is real, and the first sign of the shape of the future.

Frankie Brown, Senior, is 52 and his wife Mary is 49. Like most of the workers on the South Delta Sugar plantation these days, he is what is called a tractor driver—or, more familiarly, a tractor jockey. "Tractor" may mean any kind of heavy, mechanized equipment—planters, cane cutters, loaders —depending on the season of the year and the work to be done. Brown was always a tinkerer, and once hoped to have a car of his own, so he was glad when the big changeover came. He stepped into his new role as driver pretty well, even though he was in his middle forties then. But he's heard the owner curse at having to turn over a $20,000 piece of equipment to a hand who couldn't read the oil gauge, and even though Frankie Brown feels capable himself, it makes him nervous.

One of the good things about mechanization, as far as Brown is concerned, is that work is steady now. He has no idea what has become of the crew of migrants who used to crowd into the fields each harvest time, and he doesn't keep in touch with the neighbors who have moved down into New Orleans or all the way up to Chicago. Good with his hands, and with machines, is Brown but never one for writing; it's been a good forty years since he left fifth grade for his first harvest. Still, the others are gone, and for the Brown family the visible result has been fairly steady work, five days a week, and a steady income.

Wages are double what they used to be, but all that means is 70 cents an hour, $140 a month, $1,680 a year, and it doesn't seem to make much difference in his account with the company store. Brown thinks—as do a very large proportion of the workers surveyed—that other men are paid more for doing the same kind of work, but the figures don't bear him out. The men all report about the same wage for the same type of work, which averages out to 76 cents an hour. They probably report correctly, for the 1962-63 minimums under Sugar Act wage-determination formulas range from 70 cents an hour for unskilled labor to 90 cents an hour for skilled workers.

Brown is in debt to the grocery-and-clothes store on the plantation—but he has cousins just up the river who are worse off; they get paid in drafts on the company store, the way his father and his grandfather did, and never see cash. South Delta Sugar is a modern corporation, and at least it pays cash wages. Brown thinks his total debt is $445.00, but that may be just to the stores (an appliance store in town as well as the one on the plantation). He also owes the doctor

(they say that some companies or plantation owners provide medical care for the employees, but South Delta isn't *that* modern). And Brown owes a loan company, too. The loan company payment is only a couple of dollars a month, and it's been that way just about ever since he can remember. Brown wouldn't recognize the phrase "death and taxes," but the things that couple themselves with inevitability in his mind—and in that of the others—are debt and children. Only 9 per cent of the families surveyed were not in debt, and the amount rises, predictably, with the number of children.

Frankie Brown, Sr., has five children aged 10 to 18 still at home, in addition to his eldest son, Frankie Brown, Jr., 29, now married and independent. There may well be other children, unlisted on the survey form, who have moved away. The five children at home all go to school. (That's one thing the Sugar Act limitation on child labor has accomplished!) Their father expects that Tom will get through high school this year and hopes that the others will make it too. The kids are bright enough. It's stretching shoe leather out of that $35 a week that hurts. One more illness like that of two years ago—the doc still not paid—and there'll have to be another earner in the house, regardless of school. (The younger Brown, living in the shadow of his father and already feeling the strain, answered the question: "Will any of the children complete high school?" with a *No.*)

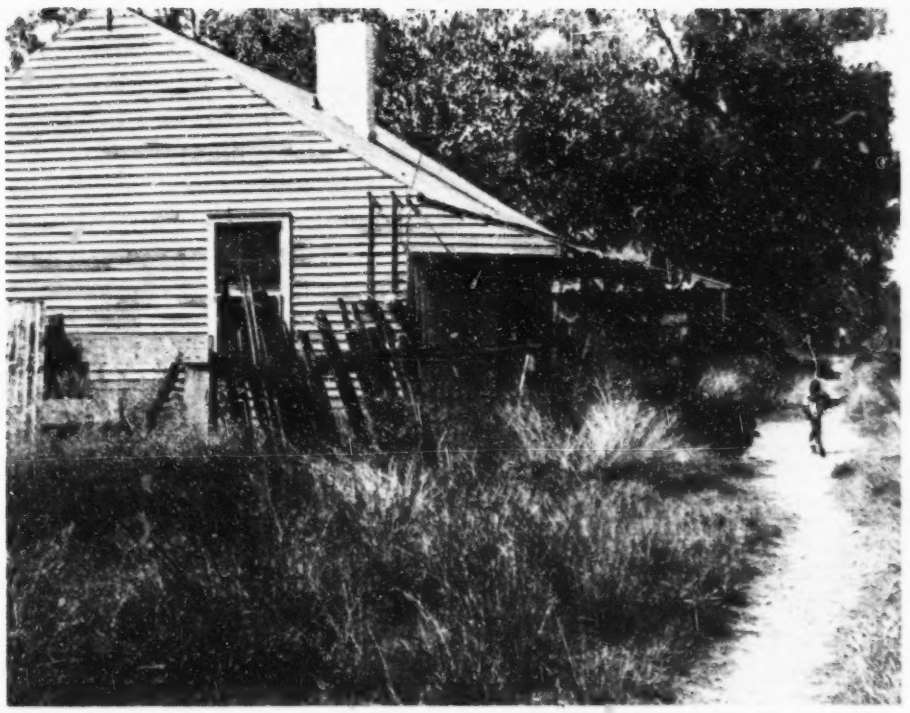
But it may be Frankie Brown's disappointment in his eldest that makes him come up with firm answers for the others.

"Do you think the children will get better jobs here than you have?" *No.*

"Will they have to leave the community?" *Yes.* "Or the state to find jobs?" *Don't know.*

Perhaps this is why he insists they stay in school until they have finished.

All seven of the Brown family live in a four-room house described by the survey interviewer as "in very poor condition; rain in the house; cold in winter; no water facilities; outhouse poor; water hydrant to every three houses." They live rent-free in the house on the plantation; and if this allows Brown better to stretch his meager salary into food for seven, still his most outspoken wish (mentioned twice on his questionnaire) is for better housing. "Wish for own home," he says. (Frankie Brown, Jr., who grew up in that same house and has now moved to a smaller counterpart, feels even more



"Main Street" in a plantation's quarters for sugar workers, eight miles from Baton Rouge.

strongly about housing.) The water—one outlet outside somewhere, and shared with other families—is free, too. Completing the possible perquisites that custom says make up for the low wages, Brown fills the blank after "lights" with *No,* and after "other," he writes, *Nothing else.*

In addition to his desire for a home of his own, Brown thinks that higher wages, more jobs, and better working conditions would help him to improve things for his family.

No one in either of the Brown families votes. There is no way of knowing whether they can't because they are Negroes; whether their poor literacy is too great a handicap (but that wouldn't be true of Junior); whether they don't realize that voting—if they all voted—would help with the problems that are closest home, from the lack of running water to keeping the kids in school. Brown doesn't take a newspaper, as his limited education might predict; but part of that debt to the appliance store is for a TV set, a miracle perhaps even greater in the life of the Browns and their fellows than the mechanization of the crop by which they make a living. For the first time in all the centuries, the outside world comes in and makes a claim on even the illiterate worker, lost on a plantation in

the rural backwash. His vision can never be so limited again, or his sights so low. The burden of debt is heavier; but for once it has brought compensation.

Today, no doubt, Frankie Brown is learning from TV about the great national war on poverty. He knew already—without the phrase—that he was living far below the "poverty level." But there were good things—like steady work and TV—as well as bad. And it was really depressing only when he looked at his son and saw a mirror image . . . The children must finish high school. They must have better jobs. They will have to leave the county; leave the plantation; leave the miserable substitute for a home, the debt to the company store, behind them; join, perhaps, the outside world of TV.

Have to? Frankie Brown, Jr., didn't. He is 29, with army service as well as school behind him. His wife Susie is 24. There are four children so far, a 6-year-old in school, and little ones of 5, 2, and 1 at home. But the rest of his answers to the questionnaire are hardly distinguishable from his father's. Tractor driver, 70 cents an hour and $140.00 a month. He gets a house and water, no lights, and nothing else. It's a three-room house in bad condition, and, like his childhood home, the rain comes in. The water is about 75 feet away outside (he doesn't say whether or not it is shared); the outhouse very bad. *"Have been praying for a home of our own,"* says Frankie Brown, Jr., *"so we could let our children learn what life is in a comfortable Home we don't feel that we feed and clothe our children properly."*

The younger Browns are in debt, too—in debt to the grocery-and-clothes store, to the appliance store (they have TV), to the doctor, to the loan company. Their debt is $385.00. It hasn't been growing so long. Frankie Brown, Jr., doesn't expect his children to complete high school, and he thinks they will have to leave town if they are to find jobs better than his. Is he more defeatist than his father because his own children are just starting, while his father can see the goal in sight if only he can hold out a few years longer? Or because he knew about his father's hopes for him and discounts any for the other children on the basis of his own experience? Is there trouble—some accident or illness—in the family that the routine questions couldn't bring out? Frankie Brown, Jr., may despair, but there is neither apathy nor indifference in that desperate prayer for home and children.

"No reference to the people engaged in the production of sugar and sugar cane would be complete," a sugar corpora-

tion's report to its stockholders affirms, "without mention of the colored plantation workers, a picturesque and romantic people famed in story and song, descendants of those originally imported in colonial days. These carefree people constitute the majority of workers on the sugar-cane plantations, and have adapted themselves quickly and efficiently to the new mechanized agriculture now practiced." [3]

A Thousand Frankie Browns [4]

Far-reaching changes in the sugar industry have not been paralleled by any equivalent modernization in the living conditions of those who still make their livelihood in the fields. This much seems clear from the survey of nearly a thousand families in the cane areas of Louisiana and it is reflected in the general economic and social conditions of the region.

Sugar cane plantations are concentrated in nine Louisiana parishes (counties), mainly up and down the Mississippi River. The Negro population of these counties is 36.7 per cent, considerably higher than the 28.5 per cent of the state as a whole. The median income of the counties ranges from less than $3,000 to more than $5,000, but the average among Negro families is considerably less than half that of the white families. Most of the sugar cane workers are Negro, and no family among the Negro field workers in sugar cane even approaches the median income of Negroes in the poorest of the nine parishes. That figure, for Assumption County, is $2,817. The median family income for the sugar worker families is $1,560 a year.[5]

Although the 902 families surveyed furnish an illustrative, rather than a statistically accurate, sampling, their wage rates can be assumed to be normal or typical because they so closely approximate the minimum for that year set by the Department of Agriculture wage determinations in accordance with provisions of the Sugar Act.[6] The average monthly income of the workers surveyed was $130 based on an average wage of 76 cents an hour.

What this seems to indicate most clearly is that in the absence of other pressures, such as unionization or unusual competition for workers, an official minimum wage tends to become a maximum; and that the official minimum set in the fall of 1962 had the effect of producing an annual wage that was just about half of what is now considered the poverty level ($3,000).

Two other factors may be said to have considerable bearing on the standard of living—obviously miserable if assessed

SURVEY

RURAL EDUCATION AND WELFARE

Questions

1. What kind of job do you have? .....

2. Is it a regular job?.....Part time job?.....

3. How many days work do you get?.....week.....month.....year

4. How much do you make an hour?.....If paid by week, how much per week?.....If paid by month, how much per month?.....

5. Are things furnished you and your family free by the man or company for which you work, such as:
   House..... water..... lights..... other.....

6. Do you make as much on your job as other people doing the same kind of work around here?.....

7. How many in your family?..... (Count husband, wife and children, and any others living in same house.) What is the age of Man?.....yrs. Age of wife.....yrs.

8. What are ages of children living at home?..... .....
   ....

9. Are any of the children going to school?..... if so, how many?.....

10. Will any of the children complete high school? ....
    Yes No

11. Do you think the children will get better jobs here than you have? .....

12. Will they have to leave the community? ..... or the state to find jobs? .....

13. Are there others in your family who are working? .....
If so, how much do they earn $.....a week $.....month

14. Are you in debt?.....If so, whom do you owe? List, such as store ..... the doctor..... the loan company..... or others .....

15. How much do you owe all together?.....

16. What do you think can be done to make things better for your family? Higher wages?..... More jobs?.....
Other things?.....

17. Are you a voter?..... Are there others in your family who vote?.....

18. What is your name?.....

19. How do you get your mail?.....

20. For whom do you work?.....

REMARKS:

(Under remarks, get as much general information as possible. The size and kind of house family lives in, its condition. Is it owned by family, rented or furnished free by employer. Is there electricity, what kind of water supply—running water, pump or well. Is there an inside bath and toilet or an outhouse. Do they get newspapers. magazines. do they have books around? Does family have a TV or radio? Also find out whether worker ever belonged to a union and if so, when. Find out if they trade at company store. Wherever possible, pick up check stubs, statements of store accounts.)

from the standpoint of wages alone. The first is the nature of the perquisites provided by the employer in addition to wages. The second is the size of the family that must be provided for on the basis of wages and perquisites.

Nearly all of those interviewed (96.7 per cent) received free housing. This is so large a percentage that it may be fairly taken that the provision of housing is standard procedure. Indeed, a publication of the sugar cane growers has pointed out with some pride that workers are born on the same plantations as their parents were born, and that they are as much a part of the plantations as the fields and the cane.[7] How many of the houses were those that housed the parents and grandparents as well is not indicated; but that many are ramshackle and in ill repair cannot be doubted. A union survey ten years ago found that many homes, once well-built slave quarters, were 75 years old.[8] Rural America has almost three times the proportion of dilapidated and substandard houses that urban America has.

If no exact description of physical detail house-by-house is possible, nevertheless the prevalent lack of conveniences accepted as normal in most of the country is a good indication of the miserable kind of living conditions endured by sugar cane workers. Thirty per cent of the 902 questioned said that running water was among the perquisites provided by the employer. But in some instances even among this 30 per cent, a breakdown of the question showed that running water meant a faucet located at some distance from the house and shared by several families. In most cases, the "free water" furnished was drawn from wells or cisterns at no expense to the employer. Only 2.9 per cent of the dwellings had an inside toilet, which is a further indication of the absence of running water in the home itself. Only 24.1 per cent said that lights were provided. Since electricity is more widely used in the area than this, the indication would be that electric bills were paid by the worker and were not part of the housing perquisite. Gas was provided for 13.4 per cent of the tenants; again, this may not mean that the others did not have the facility, but only that they had to pay for it themselves.

What this really adds up to is that the perquisites are not substantial enough to boost low wages into a decent living standard; and, particularly, that wages more comparable to the national average would give the workers the opportunity to have dwellings that were really homes, as well as the means and incentive to improve them.

The tradition of perquisites can be traced back easily to the slavery system which provided maintenance but no wages, and the wage system of the first Sugar Act inherited the practice. Thus, the system of paternalism and dependency continues. The wage determination of March 30, 1938, provided that laborers "shall have been supplied by the producer, without charge, with the perquisites customarily furnished . . . such as habitable house, garden plot . . . pasture for livestock, medical attention and similar incidentals." Through the years the perquisites mentioned in wage determinations have grown fewer and less specific, although the September 22, 1953, determination still included "habitable house, medical attention." But for the past several years, including 1963, perquisites have not been mentioned at all. They still exist, they are still somehow taken into consideration in justification of the low wage rate, yet their status is anomalous.[9]

In the recent survey of perquisites, house sizes ranged from two to six rooms, and families varied from the childless to those with eight or more children. In some cases, families of ten and twelve were found in four-room houses. But overcrowding probably is not so much of a problem as is shelter so dismal that no one would want to stay inside.

Most of the families in the survey are in debt; only 9.5 per cent are free of it altogether. And although the average indebtedness does not seem large—$204—it is about 15 per cent of the average income. As might be expected, the larger the family, the larger the amount of debt. The poorer households and the larger families owe more frequently for the necessities of life: groceries, clothing, medical bills. That 20 per cent owe medical and hospital bills is a strong indication that medical care is not so often among perquisites as is sometimes alleged.

For all that they are rooted to the same land as their parents and tied to the same crop and the same employer (despite the changing nature of the work), the sights of the workers rise beyond the drab and depressing plantation setting. Although many of them are functional illiterates (the median of Negro education is less than six years in these parishes), half the households (53 per cent) say they read a newspaper. Thirty-eight per cent of the debt is to furniture and appliance stores, partly accounted for by the fact that more than half the families have television sets. It may be their sole recreation, but it also keeps them in touch with a world their parents never had a chance to know.

Such wider horizons may, in part, explain the optimistic outlook of many sugar cane workers for their children—an optimism for which their own lives could scarcely account. Despite their own lack of education, 40 per cent of these workers believe that their children will finish high school, and a little more than half of them expect that their children will have better jobs than they have. Here is a situation in which the endless cycle of poverty has not yet destroyed either hope or aspiration.

Television may not have increased their sense of reality. Only 14 per cent of the parents think that their children will have to leave the community, and 4 per cent that they will have to leave the state, in order to get work. This may mean simply that the workers do not understand the economic and occupational implications of the changes occurring in the sugar cane industry. But it may mean, too, that they have glimpsed a personal application in the phenomenon of Negroes rising in the freedom movement across the South and have found in it hope for their children. Such workers may be nearer to the mainstream of American life than semi-literate Negro farm workers in the deep South are usually assumed to be.

Whether they have grasped the implications or not (and who is to say that the rest of the country has really come to grips with its agricultural revolution?), Brown and his fellow workers have lived through changes in the way they work that have been greater during the last generation alone than during the last two centuries.[10]

The Story of Sugar[11]

Until the 1960s, nearly all the sugar cane grown in the mainland United States was cultivated in Louisiana. The history of the state and of sugar are intertwined. Attempts to introduce sugar cane cultivation into Louisiana date from 1751. It was the great success of that crop in the West Indies that stimulated the spread of slavery and the plantation system in the New World. New Orleans, as a major port of the Caribbean, was always aware of the sugar success story and was, of course, at different times part of the French and Spanish Empires in which sugar was such a key crop. It was nearly fifty years before Louisiana's first commercially successful crop was produced (by Etienne de Bore in 1795, valued at $12,000), but the really great impetus came with the influx of experienced refugees from Santo Domingo after the revolu-

A sugar cane worker cutting cane by hand is a rare sight today.

tion there. Once the first planter succeeded, the idea was grasped eagerly, for a cash crop was badly needed to replace indigo. (Used to dye British textiles, indigo was at first important on the southeast coast also, but the British developed the industry in India, particularly after American independence, and transferred their purchasing there.)

Sugar was well suited to the plantation slavery system. It kept workers occupied for a large portion of the year. The work could be broken down into easily supervised operations. Processing could be done on the plantation itself, following the harvest and using the same labor force. Some of the workers, of course, developed special skills.

Sugar cane is a tropical plant and requires from 12 to 24 months to reach maturity. A member of the grass family, it requires fertile, well-drained soil and an abundant supply of moisture. Usually cane is found growing in the bottom lands and sometimes, if soil conditions are favorable, in the hills. Louisiana's low delta areas and warm climate are not so ideal as the islands, but they are suitable enough for profit.

In Louisiana, sugar usually is grown in rotation with some soil-building crop, such as soy beans. With such soil building,

fertilizer often is not necessary unless the original soil was deficient in minerals. The planting season runs from August through March: deep planting in the winter so that the soil protects the cutting, or shallow planting in the warmer weather. This flexibility makes for an advantageous disposal of the work time of a permanent labor force. In either case, the crop does not come up until spring, and the harvest season is October, November, and December.

In modern sugar cultivation, cane is grown from buds or cuttings and not from seed, for seed does not reproduce the same plant. The cuttings are known as seed cane, in contrast to cane seed. The first cultivation efforts in spring are to remove enough of the soil so that the sun can warm up the stalks and encourage them to send out buds. Cultivation then consists in keeping the crop clean of grass and weeds, in providing a large enough feeding area for the roots before they begin to develop, and in taking care not to prune them. More than one crop usually can be secured from a single planting.

Sugar cane is subject to attack both by disease and by insects. The chief insect enemy, a moth borer, is fought by hand labor: rooting out and destroying infested tops and pieces, and cutting out young stalks containing borers. Disease nearly ruined the whole Louisiana sugar industry in the 1920s, but disaster was thwarted by the introduction of hybrid canes from Java. Since then, the scientific development of cane types has progressed all over the world and has become a key factor in steadily increasing production.

Brown's Plantation

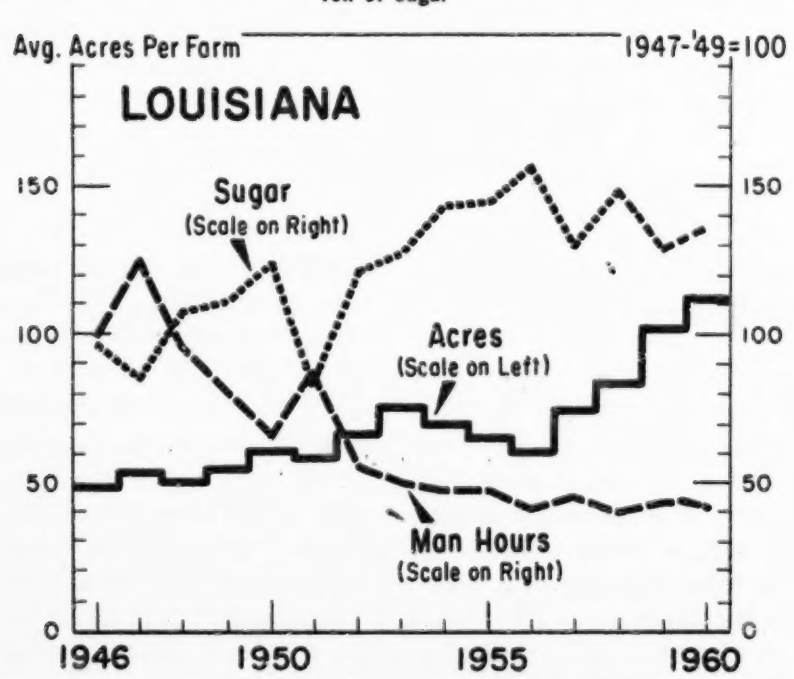
This, then, was the kind of work Frankie Brown did, as did his father before him. Often it seemed to be mainly digging: hoeing up the soil for winter planting; pushing it gently away from the root in the spring; tearing out the weeds with care to protect the seed cane; pruning against the borer—all slow and patient hand work—and finally, hand-cutting the harvest.

South Delta, where Brown and his son work, has doubled in size since the Cuban crisis. The number of workers has dropped a little but not much, for while the machines were eliminating some jobs, the acreage increase was providing additional opportunities for other workers. There are 32 full-time workers now, 25 tractor drivers and 7 day laborers. The main change has been that a special harvest gang of migrants no longer comes in.

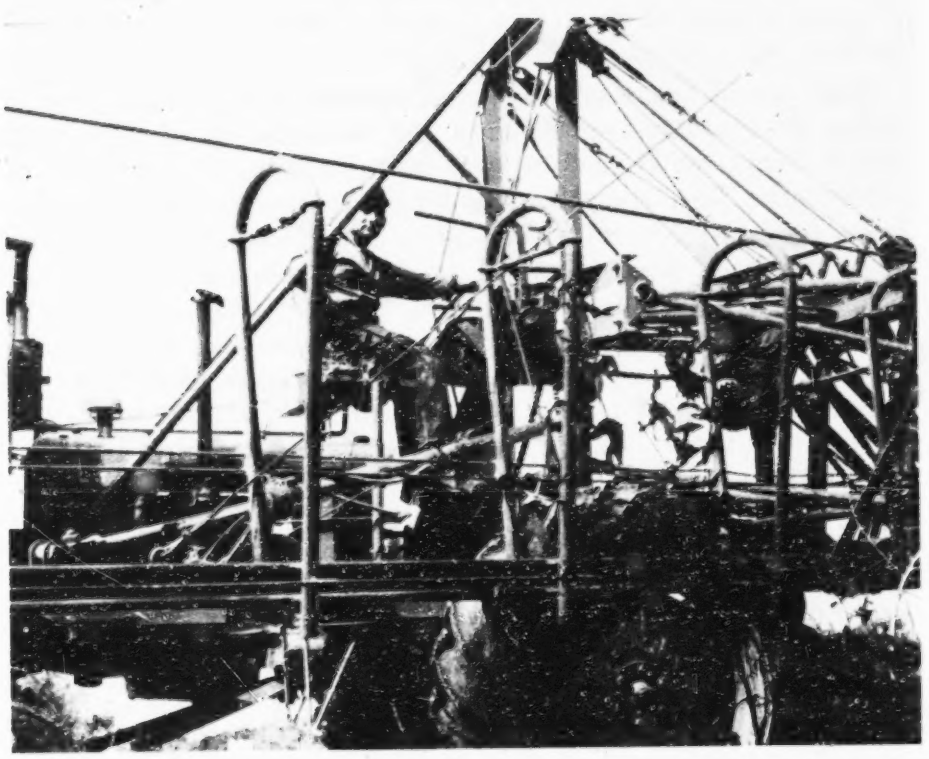
Since World War II the planting, cultivation, and harvesting of sugar cane has become a highly mechanized process with the introduction of tractors, bulldozers, steel wagons, dredge machines, mechanical cane loaders and harvesters.[12] The experimental stage in farm machinery was passed in the 1930s. The machinery was ready in the forties, increasingly used after the war, and dominant by 1955. In pre-machine days, eight acres per worker was standard; machines have made the ratio 14 to 20 acres per worker.[13] On some of the smaller farms, and particularly in cane used to produce syrup, hand cutting is still the rule. But it is too cumbersome and expensive a procedure for a plantation as large as South Delta. There is a new type of harvester that both cuts the cane stalks top and bottom and loads them into tractor or mule wagons.[14] South Delta, however, uses the type that only cuts, and Frankie Brown, Sr., drives the mechanical loader that follows it up. A mechanized harvester that requires one operator and two assistants can do the work of 60 experienced cane cutters.[15]

Now that both the Browns have become full-time tractor jockeys (and now that the plantation has expanded each year

Figure 1. Acreage of Cane per Farm, Sugar Yield per Acre, and Man Hours per Ton of Sugar



U.S. Department of Agriculture: *Sugar Reports* 115; November, 1961, p. 29.



This is one of the machines that has replaced hand cutting of cane.

as it has gained permission to put more land into sugar), the elder Brown, like other workers, no longer has the plot of ground where he used to raise greens for the table, and let a dozen chickens run, and always dream that next year he would put in just a little cotton for a cash crop of his own. He was a tenant then, even though he spent most of his time on the sugar crop. Mr. Brown still has the house. But the dream is gone, and the dependence on the plantation store is complete.

The same sort of thing has been happening all up and down the river. In 1937 there were 10,260 sugar cane farms in Louisiana with an average of 30 acres of sugar cane per farm. By 1960 the number of farms had decreased drastically to 2,547 but average acreage had increased to 111 acres of cane per farm. The total acreage in cane decreased from 307,800 acres to 282,717 acres while production per acre increased greatly.[16]

In the mainland sugar cane areas, 5 per cent of the farms accounted for more than 43 per cent of the sugar cane har-

vested in 1963. These farms averaged more than 1,300 acres of cane harvested per farm.[17] South Delta Sugar, where the Browns work, is part of the 5 per cent.

Another of the ways in which control of the sugar crop is being concentrated is through the elimination of the small sugar house, which used to process the raw sugar right on the plantation. This started long before mechanization, and has been happening everywhere. Separate plantation processing facilities have been replaced by large, more efficient sugar mills which operate through contracts with the independent sugar cane producers. In 1961 there were 46 mills in the Louisiana cane area.[18] With this type of concentration, the sugar mill owners have a strong influence on the operating patterns of the industry. They participate directly in both the production and processing of sugar cane, and they set patterns by competitive bidding and by daily or weekly quotas.[19] By the 1950s, the mills controlled 50 per cent of the harvested acreage through direct ownership or lease.[20] The rise of the sugar corporation, with ample capital, large-scale farming, and centralized management, has spelled the slow, steady decline of family farmers, sharecroppers, and tenants.

Frankie Brown knows all this, but only in general terms. He knows that the midwinter excitement of the sugar grinding is gone; with it the strain of long feverish hours as the crucial point in the processing is reached, and also the bonus pay that came with overtime. He knows that decisions that govern his life are made very far away from him, but he's not entirely clear (who could be?) as to when the grower, when the corporation, and when the government itself is making the decision. He has heard a story (somewhat magnified) of how much more money the workers in the mill receive (they average $2.51 an hour).[21] But he has no idea that field hands in Hawaii, whose sugar competes directly with his own, have a daily wage of $21.89—$16.02 in cash and $5.87 in fringe benefits.[22] And he knows that the mill has a union (so do the Hawaiians). Frankie Brown, Jr., had thought of trying for a job at South Delta's mill, but when the chance came along there were already two children in the family and a debt to the plantation store; he didn't know where he would live and he didn't dare lose the house by leaving it on a gamble that might not work out.

The elder Brown's most vivid recollection of how he learned the government controls his life doesn't really relate to the Sugar Act at all. It dates from the time "they" broke the

strike and the union. But nothing about Louisiana sugar production can be fully comprehended without reference to the unique role of government.

The Sugar System [23]

One of the strangest anomalies in the American economic order is what is called "the sugar system." It is, in effect, a controlled crop in a controlled market, with controlled prices, wages, and profits, the broad purpose being "to provide United States consumers with a safe and adequate supply of sugar at prices which would both maintain the domestic sugar industry and be fair and reasonable to consumers."

Its roots lie deep in the last century when the United States became interested in several sugar-producing areas—Hawaii, the Philippines, Puerto Rico, and Cuba—for quite different reasons. Although a tariff for revenue purposes had been collected on sugar imports almost from the beginning, national interest in these sugar-producing areas resulted in the admission of their sugar either duty-free or with preferential treatment. Cuba quickly became the major supplier and the United States her major market.

This kind of preferential system is, indeed, the world pattern. Most sugar is consumed where it is grown. Only about 30 per cent of world production moves in the world market at all, and of that, half moves in preferential systems.

The present United States system of control was shaped basically during the depression of the 1930s when world sugar prices were depressed and consumption declined. Domestic and Philippine production was increasing under tariff protection, but Cuban imports were declining and prices were at ruinous levels.

The Jones-Costigan Act of 1934 authorized the Secretary of Agriculture to determine each year the sugar consumption requirements of the United States and to divide these requirements among the various domestic producing areas and foreign producing countries so that the total quotas would equal the consumption requirements. These quotas were based largely on the source of supplies for the United States market for the three years preceding passage of the act. Certain standards were involved from the start. "Requirements" were held to be the quantity that could be marketed at a price which would maintain the domestic sugar industry at the same time that it was fair to consumers.

An adverse decision on the Jones-Costigan Act by the Supreme Court resulted in a new Sugar Act of 1937. To meet the Court's objections, the new measure substituted an excise tax for the processing tax which had been used as the source of funds for payments to domestic growers. These payments were made conditional on limitation of output and other safeguards, including a fair wage for workers. The quota system was suspended during World War II when scarcity was the rule, but reinstituted with the Sugar Act of 1948. The new act differed from the old largely in the assigning of fixed quotas to domestic and Philippine areas, regardless of changes in consumption requirements. Other countries received a percentage allotment of the remainder with Cuba's share 98.64 per cent.

Just before the Castro revolution, the United States was able to obtain about half of its sugar requirements from domestic sources. Development of sugar beet production was the major reason for the increased domestic supply, and the beet crop had increased to fill one-fourth of the demand, mostly for industrial use. Twenty-four states were then engaged in sugar production, adding enormously to the domestic political stake in the system. Hawaiian and Puerto Rican cane made up 20 per cent of the total, that of Louisiana and Florida 7 per cent. (Recently an experimental program of raising cane in California has been initiated and it is commercially successful.)[24] A little more than a third of the supply came from Cuba and 11 per cent from the Philippines.

However, when the need to replace the Cuban quota arose, there seemed to be little difficulty. The political problem of keeping a market open for her in the future dictated a cautious approach. What problems did exist were those connected with investment in processing facilities whose future use could not be guaranteed. The already expanding beet sugar cultivation could be increased as far as processing facilities were available—in fact, states were clamoring for expansion. Sugar production was already increasing in new parts of the world. Other areas of Central and South America, particularly Brazil and Mexico, were anxious to sell. India was coming up as a producer and exporter, and other less developed countries saw in sugar a new opportunity to build their export trade.

Under the impact of the drop in Cuban production and drought years in Europe, coupled with rising world demands,

sugar consumption has been exceeding production for several years. For the crop year ending August 31, 1962, the gap was 3,600,000 short tons; in 1963 it was 4,000,000 tons; and in 1964 it is estimated at 2,000,000 tons. World sugar stocks have dropped to about 10,000,000 tons.

The fear of shortage was aggravated by the fact that post-Cuba amendments to the Sugar Act made the United States more sensitive than before to the world price of sugar. A global quota was set up, outside the specific country quotas, so that the complete Cuban quota would not be distributed among other nations on anything resembling a permanent basis which would make it politically difficult to return the quota to Cuba if circumstances permitted. Thus when world shortages appeared, and prices rose, they rose on a sufficient part of the United States' potential supply to affect domestic prices and to cause stock hoarding at the very time prices were highest.[25] From early 1962 to mid-1963 world sugar prices climbed from a 22-year low to the highest level in more than 40 years.[26] But they started down again at once because the scarcity was more apparent than real. It was, however, one of the reasons for lifting acreage restrictions on the 1964 sugar cane crop in Louisiana and Florida.[27]

There is no long-run problem of sugar supply at the agricultural level. Consumption may go up in the poorer areas of the world, but production will rise in those same areas to meet it. In the United States, per capita consumption has increased by about three million tons since 1934, when the "sugar system" went into effect, but now it has nearly stabilized. Growing population will mean some increase, but since sugar consumption levels off and does not increase continuously with income, a stable demand can be forecast.

Further, sugar is a crop in which price bears practically no relationship to demand. For one thing, industrial uses account for a little more than half of total sugar consumption; by 1970 it will be three-fifths. (Industrial uses are for canned fruits, soft drinks, and so on.) Here the price of raw sugar is felt only indirectly by the consumer. A sharp rise might turn industrial users toward corn or other sweeteners, but the manufacturers would need considerable incentive. In addition, the amount of sugar bought directly for consumption is an insignificant part of the family food budget, and nothing but a drop in the family fortunes below the poverty level would be apt to influence sugar consumption for the sake of economy.

The United States Sugar Industry

Nearly 45,000 farms grow sugar beets or sugar cane for sugar in the United States. There are 64 sugar beet processing factories, 108 cane sugar mills, and 33 refineries. In 1959, farm investment in sugar was $750 million and factory-refinery investment, $1,650 million. About 300,000 workers were employed in producing, processing, and refining sugar.

"Average annual Sugar Act payments [to growers from the government] have ranged between $2.34 and $2.41 per ton of sugar beets. Average annual payment per ton of sugarcane have ranged from $1.11 to $1.22 on the mainland, $0.98 to $1.06 for Hawaii, $1.59 to $1.69 for Puerto Rico, and $1.24 to $1.46 for the Virgin Islands.

"The basic rate of 80 cents per hundred pounds of sugar, raw value, is paid on the first 350 short tons commercially recoverable sugar contained in beets or cane produced on a farm. This rate is reduced progressively to a minimum of 30 cents per hundred pounds on all recoverable sugar produced in excess of 30,000 short tons from beets or cane on a farm." [28]

In 1961, government payments under the Sugar Act totaled more than forty-four million dollars, of which Louisiana received $6,802,000, more than any other state excepting California.[29] Total payments to Louisiana producers in 1963 had risen—along with the size of the crop—to $11,055,000.[30]

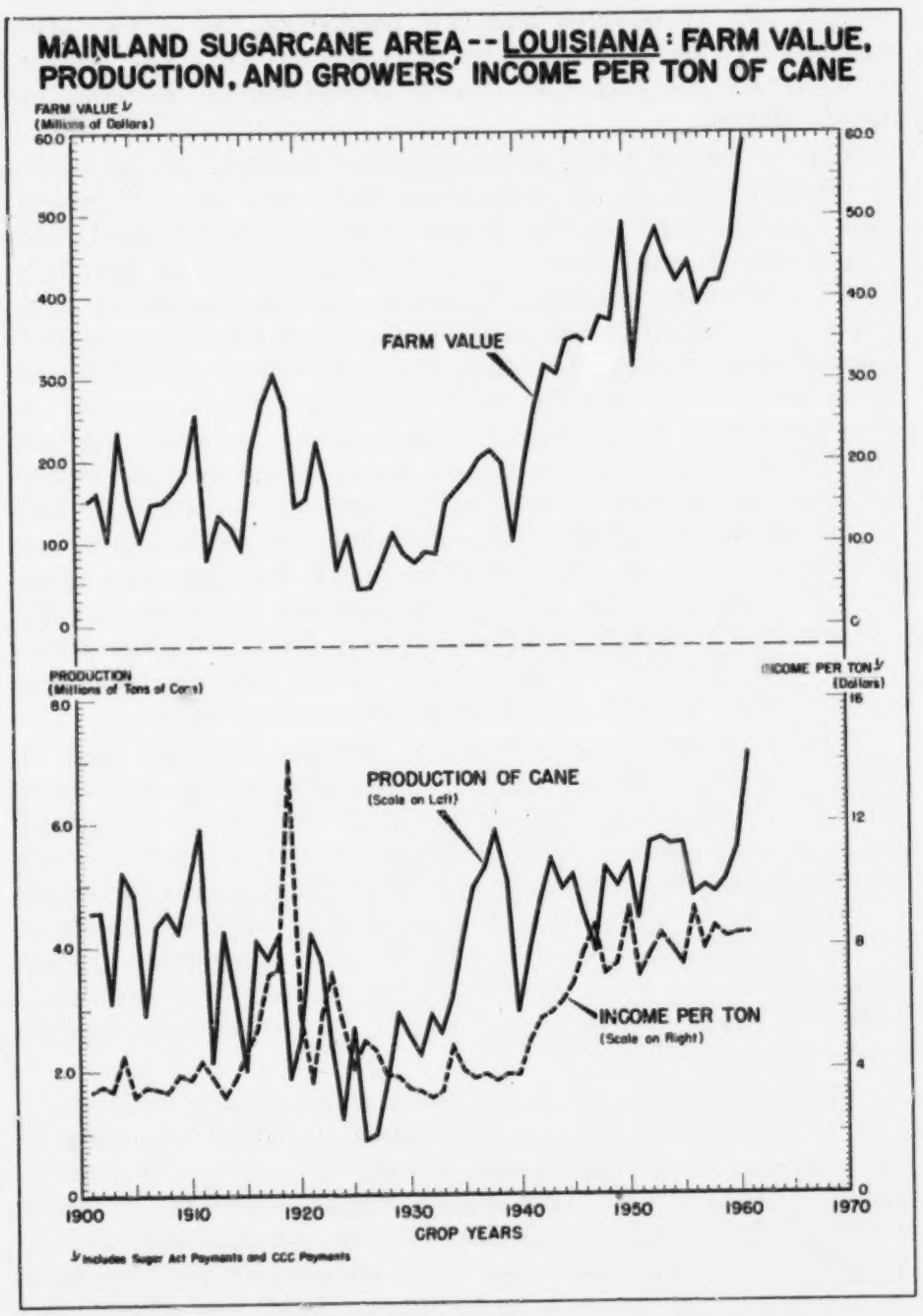
So much for the position of growers under the Sugar Act. What about Frankie Brown and his co-workers?

Workers under the Sugar Act of 1948

When the 1948 Sugar Act was passed, public-minded Congressmen insisted that legislation which would protect growers with public funds should also afford some protection to the workers producing the crop. Accordingly, the requirements of the Sugar Act include certain wage provisions: "That all persons employed on the farm in the production, cultivation or harvesting of sugar beets or sugar cane with respect to which an application for payment is made shall have been paid in full for all such work, and shall have been paid wages therefor at rates not less than those that may be determined by the Secretary [of Agriculture] to be fair and reasonable after investigation with due notice and opportunity for public hearings."

In order to determine "fair and reasonable" wage rates, the Department of Agriculture annually announces public hear-

Figure 2.



U.S. Department of Agriculture: *Sugar Reports* 120; April, 1962, p. 6.

ings in sugar-growing areas, to which all interested parties are invited in order "to express their views and to present appropriate data with respect to wages and prices." This sounds like an obvious and fair procedure, yet it has often appeared to be a consultation between growers and government to fix the wages by which unrepresented workers are most affected.

This is mainly because unorganized workers are at a very great disadvantage in presenting their own case. Organizations such as the American Sugar Cane League and the Louisiana Farm Bureau Federation, which appeared at the July, 1963, wage-determination hearings for the Louisiana area, can always afford to take time to appear at the hearings; it is part of their business function. Workers have to sacrifice time from the job and can ill afford transportation costs; nor do they have their own union officials to speak for them. (A partial effort to correct this is now being made by the Department of Agriculture by moving the hearings—previously held in the major city of the area—nearer to the fields and by not scheduling them at peak labor periods.) Furthermore, unorganized workers have neither the research facilities nor the personnel to prepare information and documentation which must take into account all aspects of the complicated sugar system and situation in defending the workers' case.

. Finally, workers start with a liability because agricultural wages are always viewed in the light of the traditional and actual low-wage standards that prevail in a largely unorganized industry. Comparisons are not made with—nor standards set by—general or manufacturing wages; the gauge is rather farm wages, which have always been substandard. By strange American precedents, "fair and reasonable" means one thing in the field, another in the factory. The difference between sugar refinery and sugar field wages is enough to demonstrate that.

While field wages for sugar workers have been inching up, and a considerable advance was made in 1964,[71] the rate of increase has never been great enough to narrow the gap between industrial and farm wages. Sugar workers, like other farm workers, lag behind not only in absolute but also in relative terms. Yet their need is all the greater for they have so much catching up to do in living standards and educational and cultural advantages.

Where, as in Hawaii, sugar field workers are organized, specific wage rates are not stated but the provision is made

Table 1. Farm Labor Costs and Man-Hours Per Ton of Sugar, and Hourly Earnings of Field Workers

Area	*Labor Costs Per Ton Sugar*[1]			*Man-Hours Per Ton Sugar*			*Hourly Earnings of Fieldworkers*[1]		
	1947–49	*1960*	*Change %*	*1947–49*	*1960*	*Change %*	*1947–49*	*1960*	*Change %*
Louisiana	$48	$36	−25	118	48	−59	$.41	$ .74	+80
Florida	38	24	−37	58	22	−62	.66	1.11	+68
Hawaii	27	30	+11	30	17	−43	.93	1.74	+87
Puerto Rico	44	45	+ 2	134	89	−34	.33	.50	+52
Beet Area	33	27	−18	41	23	−44	.82	1.18	+44

[1]Excludes fringe benefits.

U.S. Department of Agriculture: *Sugar Reports* 115; November, 1961, p. 30.

in the wage determination "that the wage rates be not less than those agreed upon between the producer and the worker. The transition to the 'agreed upon' type of wage determination was made coincident with the emergence of collective bargaining agreements. . . ." Hawaii growers, because their plantations are so large, actually receive the lowest subsidy of any area in either beet or cane sugar production. Their sugar goes largely to the same domestic American market as Louisiana sugar and at the same prices. Yet their workers receive between two and three times as much as mainland American workers. The difference is union organization.

A Union for Sugar Workers?

As long ago as 1879, newly freed slaves in Louisiana attempted to organize to get higher wages for their work on the sugar plantations. Their movement was crushed when the Governor of Louisiana called out the state militia and had the leaders jailed for trespassing. A long period of repression followed as those freedmen, together with others throughout the South, lost the political and civil rights they had won in the Reconstruction period and were reduced to economic peonage not far from slave conditions. It was a period of repression for the labor movement all over the United States and, as is well known, the basic mass industries of the country were not organized successfully, nor labor's rights firmly established, until the 1930s. Even then, as the right to collective bargaining, the minimum wage, unemployment insurance, elimination of child labor, and other protections were won, agricultural workers were specifically excluded from this legislation. Urban workers also benefited through the development of low-income housing, social security, and health, recreation, and educational facilities not available in rural areas.

Sugar workers had a slight advantage over other farm workers because of the protections written into the various Sugar Acts. Child labor was limited. Growers could no longer set wages with reference to nothing but their own profits. Machinery to process claims for unpaid wages was established. Standards for compensable working time were laid down and responsibility for equipment and wearing apparel was assigned. But this was far from enough to bring sugar cane workers into the mainstream of American economic life.

In 1953, for the first time since the nineteenth century, sugar cane plantation workers again attempted to organize

through the National Agricultural Workers Union and with the assistance and encouragement of some rural priests of the Catholic Archdiocese of New Orleans. Nearly 2,000 of those employed on some of the larger sugar plantations asked their employers to meet with workers' representatives to discuss the wages and working conditions then prevailing. The employers refused even to talk to their employees, and a strike which lasted for about thirty days of the sugar cane harvest followed.

It was then that the vestiges of the plantation-slavery system came to life. Sugar production makes for a monolithic society. The large landowner obviously controls jobs and thus the economic life of the people. His power is greater because they live in *his* cabins on *his* land. Sometimes the store to which they are indebted is *his*, and on *his* land. His ownership is also apt to extend into the nearest towns, to control stores, motion picture theaters, automobile service stations; his influence on local schools, hospitals, and banks is great. His connection with similar neighboring landowners is close, sometimes by marriage, sometimes by generations of friendship and association, always by culture and skin color. To be blacklisted by one employer is to be outlawed by all. The same employing class hold seats in the legislature and appointments in the courts.

Thus the 1953 strike against the plantations was a strike against a whole system of society. Strikers were evicted from their homes; they found their credit cut off at the store and unavailable elsewhere. Sheriffs arrived at the door with notices of accumulated bills from various sources, all suddenly due. Police violence was rampant. In one case when an employer petitioned for an injunction, the judge identified himself as a former employee of the petitioner and strengthened the case for the injunction out of his own experience.[32]

No wonder the strike was broken. Sugar cane corporation farms succeeded in securing broad injunctions from local and state courts prohibiting the farm workers from striking during a harvest of perishable farm products. This action was based on the theory that since agricultural workers were excluded from all national labor relations laws, they were therefore forbidden to join together and act in concert. Two years after the strike was broken, the United States Supreme Court ordered the Louisiana State Supreme Court to set aside the injunction. But by that time the union local, unable to do any-

Union officers are shown organizing relief for sugar cane workers during the 1953 strike.

thing for its members but to see them terrorized and jailed, had disintegrated.

In the ten years that have elapsed since the 1953 strike, the sugar cane workers have not forgotten the union. Although the printed questionnaire of the nearly 1,000-family survey did not include a specific question on union membership, about 300 of those questioned stated that they were union members.[33] Technically, of course, they are not; but in sympathy and in recognition of the need for union organization, they are. Some of them wanted to pay dues and get started again immediately.

Changing conditions, both in the industry and in the Louisiana situation, have created a greater opportunity at present. Men who are regularly employed on a year-round basis, as nearly all of them are, are more readily organized. One of the few achievements of the 1953 organizing drive was to secure enough public pressure to defeat the employers' attempt to import foreign workers (British West Indians) as strike-breakers. It was the last attempt to import foreign workers there. Since then, the change in the work pattern has nearly

eliminated the use of seasonal labor altogether, so there is no great pool of experienced sugar cane workers for employers to use in replacing present workers should they attempt to organize and bargain collectively. Moreover, the increasing skills demanded of sugar cane workers, nearly all of whom must now operate heavy machinery, both makes them harder to replace and creates a climate of acceptance for the idea that higher skills should be rewarded by higher pay and that the workers deserve a living wage. And finally, the increasing militancy of the civil rights movement—and its success in other areas of the South—is waking up Louisiana too, and strengthening a will to fight for rights which have not been achieved through years of patience, attempted negotiation, and reliance on government paternalism.

The national war on poverty will help, too. How can one war against want without attacking low wages and rural slums that make poverty an endemic disease? There will be more public willingness to accept and support extension of American standards and practices to farm workers.

A beginning already can be seen in Louisiana in the revival of union organization in related fields of work. The former organization of the sugar cane workers, the National Agricultural Workers Union has merged into the Amalgamated Meat Cutters and Butcher Workmen of North America, AFL-CIO. It has become a special division of the Amalgamated called the Agricultural and Allied Workers Union No. 300. The union has been successfully organizing dairy and rice workers as well as fishermen in Louisiana, and it has not forgotten the sugar cane workers.[34] In key areas of wage determination and manpower training, it has made its voice heard.

1963 Wage Determinations

When wage-determination hearings for sugar cane workers were held at Houma, Louisiana, on July 18, 1963, it was obvious that sugar cane workers deserved a fairer share in the increasing prosperity of the sugar industry. Even the American Sugar Cane League suggested a 10-cent-an-hour increase, in which the Louisiana Farm Bureau Federation concurred, although both opposed a bonus.[35] The price of sugar had been rising, in a delayed reaction to the Cuban crisis. Productivity on the farm continued to grow. Large sugar cane farms realized a net profit of $1.44 per ton of cane on the 1961 crop, compared with a net income of 42 cents a ton for the 1960

Table 2. Weighted Average Earnings of Field Workers, in Dollars per Hour[1]

Crop year	*Louisiana*	*Florida*	*Hawaii*		*Puerto Rico*	*Beet area*
			Earnings	*Fringe benefits*		
1950	0.444	0.667	1.089	0.1[illegible]	0.348	0.888
1955	0.564	0.885	1.448	0.405	0.437	0.943
1960	0.738	1.110	1.794	0.557	0.556	1.117
1962*	0.834	1.185	2.003	0.734	0.600	1.160

[1]Based on average hourly cash earnings of workers employed on time or piece work rate basis. In addition, workers receive non-cash benefits valued at 2 to 19 cents per hour except in Hawaii. Fringe benefits to workers in Hawaii are listed above.

*Preliminary.

U.S. Department of Agriculture: *Sugar Reports* 137; September, 1963, p. 34.

crop[36] and a loss of 38 cents a ton for the 1959 crop.[37] Small family farms did even better.

The Department of Agriculture summarized these changed conditions:

> The production of sugar cane in Louisiana has been a profitable operation during recent years due largely to favorable yields of sugarcane and sugar, increases in raw sugar and molasses prices, and improvement in production practices which have resulted in greater labor productivity. Producers realized favorable profits from the 1960, 1961, and 1962 crops, and present prospects indicate another record crop in 1963. In view of current prospects for the 1963 crop and the trends in labor productivity gains during recent years, the increased wage rates of this determination are deemed equitable.[38]

Many organizations concerned with farm and labor questions, including the National Advisory Committee on Farm Labor and several trade unions, urged that wages for all sugar workers be raised. A letter from the Agricultural and Allied Workers Union No. 300 to the Secretary of Agriculture stated:

> In the past, your predecessors in office have maintained that the legislative history of the original National Sugar Act required the Secretary of Agriculture to base his determinations of fair and reasonable wages required to be paid to sugar cane and beet field workers on the market price of sugar. In view of the fact that the price of sugar has nearly doubled since 1961, it appears to us that you will be justified in raising the wage rates of sugar field workers to nearly double the minimums required for the 1962-63 season. We express the hope that you will exercise your authority in this matter and determine that no grower receiving acreage allotments and subsidies under the Sugar Act shall pay less than $1.25 an hour, the equivalent set under the Fair Labor Standards Act beginning September 3 for industrial workers.[39]

The National Advisory Committee on Farm Labor wrote to Secretary of Agriculture Freeman on August 2, 1963:

> A fair and reasonable wage should presumably mean a wage sufficient to feed, clothe, and house a worker and his dependents in minimal health and well-being. In a seasonal industry where workers are denied unemployment benefits, we do not see how a wage less than [that] required by the Fair Labor Standards Act could possibly support a worker and his family in any part of the United States.

The increase ordered as of October 18, 1963, 15 cents an hour, resulted in minimum rates ranging from 85 cents an

hour for unskilled workers to $1.05 an hour for operators of mechanical loading or harvesting equipment, with a bonus conditional on a further rise in the price of sugar.[40]

Protests by growers, led by the Louisiana Farm Bureau, followed, but unions and civic organizations which had originally supported the need for wage increases were able to counteract the corporate-grower influence. A revised statement, issued by the Department of Agriculture on November 4, 1963,[41] modified the scale of the bonus slightly to give greater benefits to skilled workers but held firm on the general increase. The Department's amendment provided bonus payments for harvest work ranging from 1.7 cents an hour for the more highly skilled workers to 1.3 cents for unskilled workers for each one-tenth cent per pound by which the season's average price for raw cane sugar exceeded 6.7 cents a pound. Union sources believed that the bonus might amount to as much as 30 or 40 cents an hour if the market price of sugar remained at its December height, or went higher.

Better Wages for Better Workers

The union fully understands the relationship between developing skills adequate to handling the complicated machinery of today's mechanized farms and securing adequate wages for the men who man the machines. The transition to mechanized sugar cane production came faster than the preparation of workers to take over the new jobs, although many of them started at once and did their best with unfamiliar machinery. Large employers particularly, with costly investments in machinery and the need for efficient operation to maximize profits, are anxious to have skilled employees and willing to pay to get them.

A project to train men as operators of tractors and other heavy farm machinery used in sugar cane production was therefore suggested in 1963. The refusal of the State of Louisiana to sign any agreements with the federal government for training programs under the Manpower Development and Training Act meant that no state agency could be involved and created difficulties and delays. However, the Industrial Relations Department at Loyola University agreed to sponsor a project near Reserve, Louisiana, and owners of several large sugar cane plantations offered to provide facilities on their plantations and to encourage men working for them to become trainees. (The Governor of Louisiana has since signed an

agreement with the U.S. Department of Labor to use federal funds for MDTA training programs in that state.)

The project was developed within the framework of the Area Redevelopment Administration's training provisions and the training course finally got under way in May, 1964. Federal funds amounting to nearly $13,000 were made available. Thirty tractor drivers enrolled in a 16-week course in farm-machine operation. In addition to the technical training, the course also included remedial reading, writing, and arithmetic. Classroom work was conducted in the Sugar Workers Union Hall in Reserve.[42]

The Future for Sugar Cane Workers

Today, the future for sugar cane workers looks more hopeful than it has ever looked before. But there is an *if* in every hope for a better future. And that *if* is the amount of public support of concerned citizens and their organizations behind the struggle of sugar workers, and other agricultural workers, for a decent livelihood, a secure future, and equal opportunity for their children.

Many things contribute to an optimistic forecast: the pilot training program, which can lead to programs adequate to train all the workers the industry needs; the wage increase, which can become a precedent for raising wages (as skills also are rising) until all trained agricultural workers are as well off as trained industrial workers; union organization, which can protect and advance such gains; an anti-poverty program, which can coordinate community and federal efforts to rebuild depressed areas and rescue the younger generation; increased support for coverage of farm workers under existing social legislation from which they are now excluded; the civil rights struggle, in which Negro workers have assumed responsibility.

In all of this, sugar cane workers stand ready to do their share. In none of it can they succeed alone. The National Advisory Committee on Farm Labor hopes that this pamphlet will contribute by providing the information upon which an aware public can base its support.

APPENDIX

SUMMARY OF SURVEY*

Louisiana Sugar Cane Workers

Question	*Number*	*% of 902*
Question		
Present type of work		
Tractor driver	617	68.4
Cane cutter	12	1.3
Machine operator	9	1.0
Mechanic	5	.6
Laborer	259	28.7
Duration of work		
Full-time	880	97.6
Part-time	22	2.4
Days worked per week		
Less than five	9	1.0
Five	862	95.6
More than five	30	3.3
No answer	1	.1
Days worked per year		
Less than 240	21	2.3
240	267	29.6
272	589	65.3
More than 272	8	.9
No answer	17	1.9
Pay rate per hour		
Less than [illegible]	35	3.9
65¢ [illegible]	88	9.8
70¢ [illegible]	30	3.3
75¢—79¢	709	78.6
80¢ or more	30	3.3
No answer	10	1.1
Wages per month		
Less than $120	78	8.6
$120—$139	455	50.4
$140 or more	357	39.5
No answer	12	1.3

Question	*Number*	*% of 902*
Items furnished free by employer		
House	872	96.7
Water	849	94.2
Lights	217	24.1
Gas	121	13.4
Do you make as much as others doing the same kind of work		
Yes	220	24.4
No	661	73.3
Don't know	21	2.3
Persons living in house		
One to two	172	19.1
Three to four	285	31.6
Five to six	207	23.0
Seven to eight	144	16.0
Nine to ten	52	5.8
Eleven to twelve	29	3.2
Thirteen or more	13	1.4
Age: Male		
Younger than 25	98	11.1
25 to 34	286	32.5
35 to 44	238	27.1
45 to 54	131	14.9
55 or over	127	14.4
No answer	22	2.4
Age: Female		
Younger than 25	176	22.0
25 to 34	246	30.8
35 to 44	249	31.2
45 to 54	81	10.1
5 or over	47	5.9
No answer	103	11.4

*Data analyzed by Social Science Research Program, Loyola University of the South

Question	*Number*	*% of 902*
Number of children		
None	175	19.4
One child	131	14.5
Two children	153	17.0
Three	86	9.5
Four	127	14.1
Five	60	6.7
Six	84	9.3
Seven or more	86	9.6
Age of youngest child		
No children	175	19.4
One to two years old	255	28.3
Three to four	129	14.3
Five to six	124	13.8
Seven to eight	83	9.2
Nine to ten	42	4.7
Eleven to twelve	29	3.2
Thirteen to fourteen	17	1.9
Fifteen to sixteen	24	2.7
Seventeen or older	22	2.4
Age of oldest child		
No children (or one child)	305	33.8
One to three years of age	25	2.8
Four to six	73	8.1
Seven to nine	120	13.3
Ten to twelve	108	12.0
Thirteen to fifteen	124	13.8
Sixteen to eighteen	81	9.0
Nineteen to twenty-one	41	4.5
Twenty-two or older	25	2.8
Children attending school		
None	304	33.7
One	146	16.2
Two	163	18.1
Three	98	10.9
Four	99	11.0
Five or more	92	10.0
Will children complete high school		
No child	175	19.4
Yes	293	32.5
No	364	40.4
Perhaps	70	7.8

Question	*Number*	*% of 902*
Will your children get better jobs		
No child	175	19.4
Yes	380	42.1
No	137	15.2
Perhaps	210	23.3
Will children leave community for job		
No child	175	19.4
Yes	100	11.1
No	435	48.3
Perhaps	189	21.0
Will they leave the state		
No child	175	19.4
Yes	32	3.5
No	437	48.5
Perhaps	258	28.6
Someone else in family employed		
No, only myself	790	87.6
Yes, one other	112	12.4
How much do they earn		
No other family member working	798	88.5
$5 to $9 per month	3	.3
$10 to $19	68	7.5
$20 to $39	30	8.9
$50 or over	3	.3
Debt		
Yes	816	90.5
No	86	9.5
Whom do you owe		
Car dealer	64	7.1
Clothing store	30	3.3
Doctor	129	14.3
Gas company	5	.6
Gas station or mechanic	33	3.7
Grocery store	318	35.3
Furniture and appliance store	319	35.4
Hardware store	24	2.7
Jewelry store	11	1.2
Hospital	52	5.8
Loan company	40	4.4
Others	71	7.9

Question	*Number*	*% of 902*
How much do you owe		
Less than $100	349	38.7
$100 to $199	118	13.1
$200 to $299	106	11.8
$300 to $399	88	9.8
$400 or more	141	15.6
No debt	100	11.1
Make things better		
Higher wages	872	96.7
More jobs	880	97.6
Better working conditions	65	7.2
Better living conditions	22	2.4
Vote		
Yes	784	87.0
No	103	11.4
No answer	15	1.7
Other voter		
One other voter	611	67.8
Condition of house		
Pretty good	478	53.0
Standard	84	9.3
Substandard	247	27.4
No answer	93	10.3

Question	*Number*	*% of 902*
Number of rooms		
One or two	54	6.0
Three	61	6.8
Four	81	9.0
Five or six	24	2.7
Do you have		
Running water	271	30.1
Indoor toilet	26	2.9
Radio	149	16.5
Television	523	58.0
Newspaper	479	53.1
Books or magazines	7	.8
Form of wages		
Check	104	11.5
Cash	416	46.1
Other	7	.8
No answer	375	41.6
Trade at company store		
No store	2	.2
Trade there	30	3.3
Do not trade there	12	1.3
No answer	858	95.2
Union member		
Old member	269	29.8
Used to be	20	2.2
Never was	40	4.4
No answer	573	63.6

NOTES

1. H. L. Mitchell to F. Bennett, November 17, 1961.
2. The survey was made in 1961-62 by the Rural Education and Welfare Fund under a grant from the National Sharecroppers Fund.
3. *Down Among the Sugar Cane,* undated, unpaged brochure distributed by the South Coast Corporation of Houma, Louisiana, "for the general information of the security holders" of the corporation.
4. The questionnaires from the survey were analyzed and the data processed by the Rev. Joseph H. Fichter of the Department of Sociology, Loyola University of the South, with the collaboration of Jo Ann Prat. Fr. Fichter's report on the survey, *Workers in the Sugar Cane,* provided the basis for this section, excepting as indicated in other footnotes.
5. Fichter, J. H.: *Workers in the Sugar Cane.* New Orleans: December, 1963; pp. 4-6 (from U.S. Census, 1960). Hereafter cited as Fichter.
6. The official range was from 70 cents an hour unskilled to 90 cents an hour skilled. U.S. Department of Agriculture, Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service: *Wages, Sugarcane, Louisiana;* issued October 26, 1962.
7. *Down Among the Sugar Cane.*
8. [Galarza, Ernesto]: *The Louisiana Sugar Cane Plantation Workers vs. The Sugar Corporations, U.S. Department of Agriculture, et al.* Washington, D.C.: Inter-American Educational Association, Inc., 1954; p. 145. Hereafter cited as Galarza.
9. Galarza, pp. 139-44; also, U.S. Department of Agriculture annual wage determinations, Sugar, Louisiana.
10. The findings of the survey, on which this section is based, are summarized in the Appendix.
11. Material in this section is drawn largely from Taggart, W. G., and Simon, E. C.: *A Brief Discussion of the History of Sugar Cane.* Baton Rouge: The Louisiana State Department of Agriculture and Immigration, 1960 (15th ed.).
12. Fichter, p. 2.
13. Galarza, pp. 129-30.
14. Taggart and Simon include a discussion of new machinery. A fuller picture will be found in Maeir, E. A.: *Story of Sugar Cane Machinery* (cited in Galarza); and in Sitterson, J. C.: *Sugar Country,* Lexington, Ky.: University of Kentucky Press, 1953.
15. Galarza, p. 10.
16. Fichter, p. 3. Also, *Special Study on Sugar: A Report of the Special Study Group of the U.S. Department of Agriculture.* Printed for the use of the Committee on Agriculture (87th Congress, 1st Session), February 14, 1961; p. 50.
17. W. S. Stevenson to R. Myers, June 17, 1964.

18. U.S. Department of Agriculture, Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service: *Sugar Statistics and Related Data* (Vol. II, revised July, 1963). Statistical Bulletin No. 244; p. 35.
19. Fichter, p. 2.
20. Galarza, p. 8.
21. *Special Study on Sugar*, p. 30. Cane refinery workers in the New York area average $3.00 an hour with an additional 75¢ in fringe benefits, according to Hon. Robert R. Barry in *Congressional Record* (House), May 14, 1964; p. 10601.
22. 1962 figures; Hon. Spark M. Matsunaga, *Congressional Record Appendix*, Extension of Remarks, November 6, 1963; p. A6919.
23. Material in this section is drawn largely from *Special Study on Sugar*.
24. Discussed in "News of Arizona and California: Cane Comes West," *Western Crops & Farm Management*, June, 1962; p. 18A.
25. Lamborn, Ody H.: *1964—Sugar Year of Decision*. Speech before annual convention of the American Bottlers of Carbonated Beverages. Dallas, Texas, November 21, 1963. Also, the 1962 amendments were discussed extensively in the U.S. House of Representatives on June 8, 1964.
26. "Sugar," *Industrial Economics Handbook Newsletter*, July-August, 1963.
27. Ruling in *Sugar Reports* 133, May, 1963; p. 24.
28. *Special Study on Sugar*, pp. 28-29; p. 41.
29. Fichter, p. 1.
30. W. S. Stevenson to R. Myers, June 17, 1964. A listing of amounts paid to individual producers was not available from the U.S. Department of Agriculture.
31. See below, pp. 33-34.
32. Galarza, pp. 25-28. The discussion of the strike is drawn largely from the Galarza study.
33. Fichter, pp. 22-23.
34. *The Lookout*, monthly bulletin of Agricultural and Allied Workers Union No. 300, Lake Charles, La. (mimeo).
35. U.S. Department of Agriculture, Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service: *Wages, Sugarcane, Louisiana;* effective October 18, 1963, for harvest work and January 1, 1964, for production and cultivation work. *Sugar Determination* 864.10; p. 2 (printed in *Federal Register*, October 22, 1963).
36. Return on capital in 1963 was 8.3 per cent. Fichter, p. 12.
37. *Sugar Determination* 864.10; p. 2.
38. *Ibid.;* p. 3.
39. H. L. Mitchell to O. L. Freeman, August 20, 1963.
40. *Sugar Determination* 864.10.
41. *Sugar Determination* 864.10, Amendment 1 (printed in *Federal Register*, November 6, 1963).
42. *The Lookout* contains reports on the development of the training course.

Your contribution to pay for this pamphlet and our other educational work is needed. Please send it to:

NATIONAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON FARM LABOR

112 East 19th Street, New York, N. Y. 10003

Co-Chairmen:
Frank P. Graham
A. Philip Randolph

Treasurer:
John A. Mackay

Assistant Treasurer:
Robert W. Hudgens

Steve Allen
William L. Batt, Jr.
Louis H. Bean
Rev. Edwin T. Dahlberg
Helen Gahagan Douglas
Rev. Walter E. Fauntroy
L. H. Foster
Rabbi Roland B. Gittelsohn
Henry B. Herman
Msgr. George G. Higgins
Jacob M. Kaplan
Rabbi Eugene J. Lipman
Isador Lubin
Archbishop Robert E. Lucey
Benjamin E. Mays
Bishop Reuben H. Mueller
Peter H. Odegard
Daniel H. Pollitt
Wilmour E. Saunders
Dore Schary
John M. Seabrook
Norman Thomas
Frederick S. Van Dyke
Josephine Wilkins

Founding Members:

Herbert H. Lehman
Mrs. Franklin D. Roosevelt
Maurice T. Van Hecke

Executive Secretary:
Fay Bennett

Program Secretary:
Helen K. Shettle

Field Representative:
Stanley Hamilton

The National Advisory Committee on Farm Labor is a voluntary, non-profit organization whose purpose is to gather and disseminate information about the conditions and problems of farm workers, and about farm labor practices and policies.

Through public education on a nationwide scale the Committee seeks to mobilize public opinion and to spark effective action by concerned groups and individuals.

Such action has been enhanced by a number of broadly representative state citizens' committees on farm labor, organized with the help of NACFL. These committees have played an active role in proposing much-needed reforms in state and local farm labor conditions, and have introduced and developed support for both state and federal legislation. To extend these vital activities additional state committees will be formed.

You may write to the NACFL for more information on this subject, for a list of other literature available, and for names and addresses of other groups concerned with this issue.